

scrap my knees, whatever; i'm gonna let them bleed by ceruleanstorm

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Summary:

prompt: things you said in the spur of the moment.

or, how many compliments can Mike and El yell at each other over a card game?

scrap my knees, whatever; i'm gonna let them bleed

Author's Note:

trash can rolls down the street and I pop out of it

"Hello beautiful people I have some fluff for you!"

prompt: things you said in the spur of the moment

"I like your freckles."

" *Do you have a set-* What- *huh ?*"

El swallowed, a blush crawling up her neck. Mike's brown eyes never left her own, but his face was scrunched up in confusion, and El would have laughed if she wasn't made speechless by- by-embarrassment. That was the word. The heat of the basement was enough without the stares she had just brought on herself, and her skin suddenly itched under Mike's "borrowed" sweater. Her timing was off again.

The most recent change of season's brought El her second real summer, and Hawkins its warmest one on record. She had spent it at the boys' side; Hopper left the house empty every morning with a cup of black coffee in his hand and a cigarette in his mouth (well, not recently. At the Wheeler's memorial Joyce and Hopper made something called a bet- a competition people placed prizes on, Mike explained- that the first one to quit by summer had to buy the other dinner) and with her friends *finally* out of school that meant they had the expense of the woods, and the junkyard and the train tracks to themselves. Mike was coming up on his 16th birthday, and in the middle of another growth spurt none of the other boys were experiencing- leading to a whole round of complaining. But while last year's summer had been filled with adventure and the air had been cool, this year, each time El stepped outside she was met by gross sticky humidity that made her sweat and her hair frizzy, and she quickly decided she hated it and preferred what was called the "A/C" Never was she more grateful than when the boys kept to the Wheeler basement or the Byer's living room. The first few weeks had been simple and easy to plan, never a dull idea suggested by the boys or a

dull moment watching as they wasted away afternoons playing Dungeons and Dragons. It was never dull when El sat with Mike at his dining room table, the sun illuminating his excited features, their fingers brushing under the table, as he talked and talked and *talked* about the next campaign. Only much to everyone's disappointment, the ideas had run out quickly, so quickly that Dustin compared their brainstormed list of ideas for the summer sucked dry like El and a box of Eggo's (she made a face at this, and Mike punched Dustin in the shoulder)

No campaigns planned or movies that hadn't already been watched ("I'm *not* watching Gremlins again, you guys! They remind me too much of Dustin!" HEY!) Mike had dug up the boards games. They burned through them as the morning bled into the afternoon, and eventually ran out of them to. El prided herself on easily she could take any of them at Battleship. Dustin beat them all at checkers and then at chess. Surprisingly, Mike was their Scrabble champion. A good hour was spent on Clue before El got bored and Lucas figured "who had done it." That left the deck of cards and Monopoly. Mike took one look at the monopoly box and asked, "I dunno. Do you guys plan on still hanging out o after today?" With it quickly vetoed by the answer that yes, they still wanted to be friends, Mike pulled out the cards instead.

"Oh I know!" his eyes lit up in a way that always brought a smile to El's face. "Let's play spoons!"

"Spoons? Man, when was the last time we played spoons?" Lucas scoffed.

"We were nine. Dustin had just moved here, we bent three of Mrs. Wheeler's nice pieces of silverware, Dustin almost gave Lucas a black eye, and then we threw Mike under the bus about the silverware and his mom grounded him." shrugged Will, his head bent back remembering. El mouthed "under the bus" to herself, running through her mental list of all phrases they'd ever taught her.

"I did *not* give Lucas a black eye!"

"Dustin, just go upstairs and get the spoons." Mike rolled his eyes. He turned to El then, his brown eyes full of worry and explained, "They

didn't *actually* throw me under a bus."

El nodded, feeling behind again all the same. Mike understood the phrases tripped her up and was patient and kind to explain what most others simply brushed off and she adored that, but she could never shake the feeling there was something *wrong* with her, that she could never *really* be like the others.

Mike squeezed her hand, bringing her back to a rare moment of bravery. "How do you *play* spoons?"

"Oh!" He smiled a bright, happy smile and dove into the rules of the game. El smiled once more, taking in the moment selfishly as he stood by her side and didn't drop her hand, watching the way his light freckles almost danced when he talked.

And she hadn't really stopped looking since, stealing a look every few minutes. El caught onto the game with ease, and fast reflexes adapted from the coldest place she called home and the darkest place she called hell, helped her swiftly steal a spoon from the pile and avoid Dustin and Lucas clambering limbs. Dustin and Lucas were the first to lose and Lucas was quick to get seven year old revenge, "accidentally" bumping Dustin's eye with his elbow. Will was next, distracted by Dustin's attempt to get ice from the freezer and in the process hitting the *other* eye, leaving only El's glare and Mike's intense stare to match.

El's eye's barely left Mike's face to even glance at the cards. She could *win* this. She would win this. A smile crept onto her face as she pulled another card, and Mike pulled another card, and she pulled another, faster this time, faster, faster, faster... It would have been child's play (and for her it *had* been child's play; other children played with dolls and action figures, Eleven was made to play with minds.) to reach and see his cards, and there had been an argument about the possibility of El's powers helping her cheat, but was shut done by Mike punching Lucas' shoulder and Will suggesting they just look for blood. She bit her lip. *Don't go there right now. Don't go to that place. You're here. You're safe. You're with Mike.* She looked up at his face again, his freckles, as she pulled another, he pulled another card, Dustin made some juvenile comment in the background, another card, another card, another, another-

And it just slipped out.

“I like your freckles.”

“ *Do you have a set-*” Mike’s hand flew to the spoon, and El could see in his face the second he really processed what had just come from her in the spur of the moment. “What- *huh?*”

Silence stunned the room, and El shifted in discomfort. She couldn’t believe that she had just said *that* to *Mike* (and they’d yet to put a label on their relationship) in front of *all their friends*.

“ She’s just trying to sabotage you, man!” Lucas shouted, breaking the silence into a million pieces.

Mike looked at Lucas, then back at her. His still carried the same look of confusion, but now she was sure his blush matched her own.

“Yeah!” Dustin added in agreement. “Don’t let her get to you! Say something about how pretty she is!”

Whipping another card from the deck, Mike’s face was set. “You look really pretty today, El!” he fired back.

Oh, like *that* was going to slow her down. She’d faced Russians and the Bad Men and the Demogorgon, her sort of boyfriend complimenting her was nothing. In his *wildest dreams*. Right? “I like your eyes!” El half-yelled, not used to the volume of her own voice, taking another card.

“Have I told you how awesome your hair looks like that?” Another card.

“I think you’re cute when you laugh!” Another card.

“You’re smile is the prettiest thing in the world!” he practically shouted. Another card.

“You’re the kindest person I’ve ever met!” Another.

Another card. Another compliment she hadn’t expected to come from Mike under any circumstance. He liked her laugh, her “cute” nose,

her voice. The Girls on she sometimes watched on TV dreamed about those things, and she always found it a little silly, and now Mike was yelling them over a card game. A mix of frustration and adoration made it hard to focus, and it didn't help when Will threw his hands up in the air and exclaimed , "What is *happening?*" and Dustin yelled twice as loud, "I don't know, but this is the most fun I've had *all summer!*"

" You're really smart!" Card.

" You're super brave!" Card.

" You waited for me!"

" You came back to me!"

" *I love how you always take care of me!*"

" *I love how you always want to protect me!*"

They were in each other's faces now, yelling at full volume, his impulsive nature and her stubbornness clashing at full force, Mike's hand finally diving for the last card. "ALL JACKS!" he shouted, stunning Eleven cold and he went for the spoon and brought it above his head in triumph. "I WIN!"

El fell back in a kind of emotional exhaustion. Her mouth tasted bitter as she wiped the sweat from her forehead, glaring at Mike from under her sleeve. Still proud as ever, he slammed the spoon down. "Want to play again?" he asked, the excitement that never failed to cheer her up only making her chest constrict. She shook her head, and his smile faded. "Oh." his shoulders fell.

"Probably for the better." Lucas shrugged. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw him bring his watch up to his face and his eyes widen. "Shit! We were supposed to drive Will back a hour ago!"

"Ohhhhh, Mrs. Byers is gonna kill us!" Dustin ran his fingers through his crazy curls, but Will, wearing a face of pure terror, was already dragging the two of them up the basement stairs by their backpack straps.

“If we move fast, the dragon might have mercy on us!” There was one last call of “See you guys tomorrow!” and “Please don’t kill Mike, Eleven!” before silence echoed in the space left by them.

El’s glare stayed on Mike as he kept his own gaze on the cards he was shuffling. “We bent the spoons again.” he muttered under his breath. She didn’t even bother looking. The spoons were an easy fix.

“Glad they didn’t throw me under the bus this time, huh, El?” Mike asked, hope bleeding into his tone.

She bit her tongue, and look away from the concern written in his face.

“El? Eleven!” Mike tried again. Falling back into his chair when she refused to give in- No. Not to him. Not right now- Mike let out a long sigh, and she knew he wasn’t going to give up on her. It was far from his strong suit. “Are you mad at me?” he whispered, that kind tone melting her will to be cold.

“Yes.” El bit and Mike’s eyes widened.

“Why? Is it because of the game? Because I won? Hey, *you* were the one that sunk my battleship, remember?” His joke fell flat on its face, and El was met by another sigh again.

“Will you *please* tell me?” he begged, those big brown eyes making him look even more like a puppy. “I can’t fix it if you don’t talk to me.”

But talking wasn’t *her* strong suit. And as she couldn’t find the words to even explain it to *Mike* , she had to accept that it would never be. All she could do was reach across the table and almost touch his cheek.

“Huh?” Again the look of confusion as he brought his own hand up to where her fingers had just barely brushed. The scrunchy face. *Dammit, El. Don’t give in.* “ Oh. Oh. Right. What you said, earlier, about my freckles.”

She gave him a nod. “I was being- being- being-” El searched for the word dancing on her tongue, shaking her hands in a desperate

attempt to find it. *It would really help if you were normal right now!* she scolded herself.

“Funny?”

“Sincere.” El corrected. “I was being sincere.”

“Wait, you meant what you said? That you like my freckles? You actually like my freckles?” Mike asked, like the idea was so unreachable even in a time of monsters and rifts in time and space and whatever she was.

El nodded, and his face grew to the color of the red she found on her fingers when touching her upper lip. Guilt overtook her. She knew it embarrassed him. Mike complained about his freckles all the time; he’d never really met anyone else with them and once told her that when he was five had a wished on every shooting star and prayed to something called God to make them disappear because Nancy and her friends made fun of them. He despised the very notion of them, but El found they were just another unique thing to love about him. “They remind me of stars.” she whispered.

If his face could have gotten any redder, it would have, covering those light freckles. Sickening guilt worsened in El and she bit her lip until she could feel the stinging warmth of blood. If it had been in her powers to make herself disappear, she would not have hesitated. *Normal girls don’t say things like that.*

But then Mike put his head in his hands. “I’m such an *moron* !”

Surprise flooded her as she looked him in the eyes again. He was shaking his head wildly and his bangs were flying from side to side. “I’m really sorry, El. I thought it was just part of the game, you know, that you were just trying to distract. God, I’m such a-”

“Mouth breather?” she finished for him and he burst into laughter.

“It’s been three years, El! And you still use that insult! I thought Lucas and Dustin taught you all those curse words and spent forever trying to get you to use them right!” The same laughter that never failed to fill her with hope echoed throughout the basement. Mike’s

face was still a deep shade of pink and he kept running his hands through his hair. *He needs to stop that*, she thought to herself, the ghost of a smile on her face, and reached for his hand.

“Mhmm. But mouth breather fits you.” Fingers intertwined with hers, and he started to laugh all over again.

“Fair enough.” he chuckled. “You got me there. I am a mouthbreather.”

“You are.”

A type of silence enveloped them in the heat of the basement. El noticed that sometimes people found silence uncomfortable and unbearable, like Nancy and Mrs. Wheeler and sometimes Lucas and Dustin; people did anything they could to break the silence. But not them. Not Mike and El. Silence was comforting, self explanatory. Safe. It was moment for just them, and only them.

“El?” Mike whispered after a moment.

“Hmm?”

“I meant what I said too. During the game? I mean I yelled it, but I meant it everything I said.”

It was her turn to blush. Suddenly, the heat of the basement and his sweater was too much. El thought of the girls on TV. Maybe they weren’t so dumb after all. Maybe she was just really, really lucky.

“Yeah?” she made herself ask.

“Well, of course yeah.” He shrugged. “Just because it was a spur of the moment thing and it was in the middle of Spoons-” El burst out laughing, and he squeezed her hand. “But I still mean. All of it.”

“Oh.” El whispered through her blush. “Okay.”

El lost track of how long they sat there, remembering all of the heartfelt words he’d said- well, yelled, tucking them away in a guarded place in her memory. She wanted to remember this feeling- *this* moment, the butterflies dancing in her stomach, Mike’s hand in

hers safe and secure, the small smile he wore on his face, and she couldn't help be reminded of that night in the cafeteria, when he gave up on words and went with his gut.

Only it wasn't the Bad Men (long gone) or the Demogorron to ruin this moment. Rather whispers from the top of the basement stairs that belonged to familiar friends.

"Do you think he's dead?" Dustin's voice floated down the steps.

"Nah, man. Mike can hold his own." Lucas said, a little louder than Dustin. "I think."

"They are being *oddly* quiet..." whispered Will.

Mike, not letting go of her grip, whirled around in his seat, screaming at the top of his lungs. "What are you guys *still* doing here?"

"We wanted to see what happened!" Dustin yelled back.

"I thought you were driving Will home!" Exasperation touched his voice, and El squeezed like always did hers.

"We are!" Lucas shouted. "But Mrs. Byers' wrath still isn't as fun as watching you two!" The next thing El heard, the sound all too familiar, were kissing noises from all three of them.

"Yeah, no kidding." Another voice responded, this one feminine, spurring Mike into a new frenzy.

"Nancy!?"

"Hey Mike, hey El!" his sister shouted back. Will joined into the kissing noise fest, and Nancy let out a loud laugh.

Mike sunk deeper into his chair. "I can't believe you guys." he moaned, running his free hand through his hair that now went every which direction from his nervous habit.

"Mike?" she asked, successfully stealing his attention from the teasing and catcalling. He looked up at her with those hopeful beautiful

brown eyes, and she smiled.

The kissing noises still came from their friends and she could see their curious looks from around the corner. He was still blushing, and they had, she realized, just been fighting. Her timing would *always* be off. But she knew with him, that was okay. He accepted her as she was, broken parts and odd ends and spur of the moment truth. And so she leaned across, hand still in his, and kissed his cheek, right where his freckles dusted his pale skin.

“HA!” One of their friends yelled. “You owe me ten bucks, Sinclair!” But neither of them noticed, too lost in each other, too lost in the moment.

His free hand on his cheek, Mike smiled at her again, and pride and adoration replaced regret and shame and guilt. Mike and Eleven. Eleven and Mike. Hawkin’s weirdo and frogface.

They were spur of the moment, they were odd. They were strange.

But even in the heat of the summer, she’d have them no other way.

Author's Note:

should i stay or should i go; track 2: Cliff's Edge-
Hayley Kiyoko

stop by and see me! tumblr: sstrangerthaneleven